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Delivered at the Funeral of the late

Mrs. A. C. Hughes,

Wife of Rev. J. R. Hughes, and Daughter of David Stewart, Esq.,

In the Presbyterian Church, in Blairsville by the

REV. GEORGE HILL, Pastor of the Church

Published by Request of Relatives and other Friends.

On the second Sabbath of May, 1865, the name of Mrs. A. C. Hughes was announced from this pulpit as having been added to the roll of the membership of this Church. It is, perhaps, only a coincidence, but it is one which has struck me with some force, that just four years from that day, a week ago yesterday, she was with us for the last time, in the public services of the sanctuary. She was here twice on that day, for she loved the house of God, and was often here when almost any other person, in her state of health, would have been in bed. She came among us an entire stranger, except that we had heard of her as a sister in Christ and an eminent sufferer in the school of affliction. But she remained not long unknown. We soon learned not only to know and respect, but also to love her. And all these four years of familiar intercourse and christian communion have only served to deepen this affection. We had come to feel as if she belonged to us; as if we had a kind of personal claim to her. We felt that she was *ours*; we called her *ours*; our friend, our helper in Christ, our fellow-worker in the Gospel.

But there are those here, to-day, to whom she was bound by yet other ties. There are those who, from childhood, on through these many years, have been accustomed to call her *my sister*, and who felt that her presence was necessary to complete the happiness of that family circle of which they each formed a part. Aye, and there are those who, through infirmity and sickness, are absent to-day, who called her by a yet more tender name, and felt that

she was theirs by a still more perfect right. They called her *my chi'd*, *my dear daughter*, and felt that she was part of their own life, as it were a portion of their own being.

O yes, and there are those here who spoke of her, and to her, by a still more endearing name. They called her *mother*, *MY mother*; and felt that they had a claim upon her, and an interest in her which no other human being had. And—how shall I say it—there is here one who claimed her as his by the holiest of all earthly ties, and called her by the most sacred of all those names which express merely human relationships. There is one who called her *my wife*; and who trusted, loved and cherished her as his bosom companion, the light of his eyes, the joy of his heart, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

By these many, and various, and strong, and tender ties she was bound to us. We all felt as if we had a kind of property in her, a right of possessing, enjoying and disposing of her; at least that we ought to be consulted, and our wishes regarded in reference to whatever concerned her. Thus we felt, and thus things remained up to the early hours of the sacred Sabbath which is past. Then, suddenly, without consulting us, without any reference to our wishes, or any regard to our will, she is hurried away from us, and we, all at once, awake to the consciousness of sundered ties, and violated feelings, and, almost, invaded rights. At least, my dear friends, there is danger of our feeling as if wrong had been done us, and as if we could scarcely be reconciled to this violent taking-away of what we had called *ours*.

Now the acquiescence of our hearts in this irreversible event, and our ability to take joyfully this spoiling of our affections, will depend entirely on the light in which we regard the event itself and the agency by which it has been effected. If we allow ourselves to look upon this scene with the eye of sense alone, we shall see only the gaunt form of death, with brandished spear and remorseless heart, striking down the loved one from our side, and hurrying her fading, changing body away to the cold and forbidding grave. We shall see only broken cords of affection, blasted lopes, and withered joys. This is the *human* side of this transaction; but it has a *divine* side also.

If we look at it by the eye of faith, we shall see here, not the land of death only or chiefly, but the hand of Him who has said, in that wonderful intercessory prayer which makes the 17th chapter of John such a resting place for all stricken hearts, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where

I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me." "*I will*"—and what right has he to will about it; and especially, by what right does his will override all our wills? Our will was not at all that she should be taken away from us. Nay, we would have retained her with us, even though we could not restore vigor to those palsied limbs, or vision to those sightless eyes, or have prevented those frequent paroxysms of pain which rent her body like the piercings of a sword. We would still have ministered to her as best we could, and cherished her, and found our happiness in those sweet communings of soul with which the intimacies of unbroken friendship and love were wont to refresh us.

But, just here, another will comes in, and, without consulting us, puts an end, all at once, to these ministries and these communings. Again I ask, by what right does this will prevail against the will of so many? What relation does he who has done this sustain to her? What claim has he upon her?

Ah, my friends, our relations to her were intimate; our claims to her, we thought, were strong; but his relation to her was more intimate, his claim to her stronger. In these words of his, which I have repeated, he indicates the origin and foundation of his claim to her: "Father, I will that they also whom *thou hast given me* be with me." O yes, she was his *by gift*—by gift of the Divine Father, the source of all being, whose right of possession and right of disposal is sovereign, absolute, perfect. "Thine they were and thou gavest them me," says Christ. Gavest them me, to be redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, guided, kept, and brought home to glory. Gavest them me, to be mine, my reward, my jewels, my crown of rejoicing, my everlasting joy.

But this is not the only claim that Jesus has upon his people. They are his not only by gift, but *by purchase*. He "loved them and gave himself for them, an offering and a sacrifice unto God." he "gave himself for them, that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people." They were redeemed *with the precious blood of Christ*." O, my friends, who of us had so strong a claim, so perfect a right to our dear departed sister, as has the blessed Jesus? Which of us could or would have given our life for her? Or if conjugal or filial love had availed to make even this sacrifice for her, could *that* have taken away her sin? could *that* have secured the favor of God, or purchased Heaven for her? Alas! no. But the blood of Jesus Christ cleansed her from all sin; *it* gave her free access to God; *it* procured for her boldness of entrance into the holiest of all.

Nor is even this all the claim that Jesus had upon her. She was his also *by conquest*. Given to him, redeemed by him, he nevertheless had to establish his right to her, and his authority over her, by his own right hand and his own outstretched arm. By his Holy Spirit he delivered her from the "strong man armed," that once kept the citadel of her heart, working in her mightily both to will and to do of his own good pleasure, thus making her willing in the day of his power. O then, who has so good a right to our departed friend as Jesus?

Nor have I yet said all that ought to be said on this subject. I have yet to add that she was his by a most free, and loving, and joyful surrender of herself to Christ. All that I ever saw of her, or heard from her, or heard about her, assures me that, much as she loved friends and fellow-Christians, much as she loved father and mother, brothers and sisters, husband and children, she loved her Savior more than them all. The language of the Spouse, in reference to her Beloved, she could and did adopt literally, "He is the chiefest among ten thousand, yea, he is altogether lovely." It was not given to her to utter on her death-bed those words of confidence and joy which are so precious to the memory, and so grateful to the feelings of surviving friends; but had her end been less sudden, and had she been permitted to utter the feelings of her heart, as the opening glories of Heaven began to shine round her soul, I cannot doubt but they would have been expressed in language kindred at least to that of that other departed sister who, just one week before, within a few minutes of the same hour in the morning, exchanged earth for Heaven. When nearing that blessed home, in answer to a remark about the possibility of recovery, she exclaimed, "O, I would not for a thousand worlds come back to life." Such, substantially, I feel assured would have been her testimony. Much as she loved earthly friends and relations, had we all stood around her dying-bed and, with streaming eyes and bursting hearts, besought her not to leave us, and had she had any clear intimation from Jesus that *he* desired her to come to him; if the decision of this question had been left wholly to her, she would, beyond all possibility of doubt, have unhesitatingly said, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." Wherein our wills and his will might have been in conflict, she would not have delayed for a moment, to say, "Let the will of my Divine Redeemer be done."

And here let me ask you to notice more particularly what the will of Christ, concerning his people, *is*, as it is expressed in his

intercessory prayer. Assuredly, there is much *here*, my friends, "to comfort us concerning our sister."

He does not say, Father, I will that they should die and return to dust. There is nothing here of the shroud, the coffin, the grave and the worm. Oh no, all this is not once named, nor called to memory by the faintest allusion. There is nothing here of sundering of earthly ties, and conflict with the king of terrors, and shrinking back from corruption and silence and gloom. No, but, in its stead, this joy-inspiring prayer "I will that they also whom thou hast given me *be with me, where I am.*" Where is Christ, my brethren? Hath not God "highly exalted him," "and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come?" O then, *is it not* "far better" to be with Christ, than to be with us? To be with Christ is to be in the presence of God, where there is "fulness of joy," and at his right hand, where there are "pleasures forevermore." To be with Christ is to be with "an innumerable company of angels," with "the general assembly and church of the first born which are written in Heaven," and with "the spirits of just men made perfect." What a society is that! What a sanctuary is that in which they bow!! and what a worship is that in which they are engaged!!!

Our sister loved the society of the saints on earth; she loved God's earthly sanctuaries; she loved the worship of these temples made with hands; how much more, then, think you, does she enjoy the society, and the sanctuary, and the worship which are heavenly? You have often seen with what painful effort—painful not only to herself, but even to the beholder—she made her way to the house of God. With halting step, an inch or two at a time, or, when the feeble limbs would no longer do the bidding of her strong will, carried in the arms of an affectionate husband, by one way, or another, she would be here. What a contrast to this her approach to the sanctuary in which she worshiped yesterday! Not with palsied step, or carried in feeble though willing arms, but mounting up with strong exulting bound, or carried by swift-winged angels, upward she took her way. Not near the day's meridian, as when she united with us in worship, but in the early hours of dewy morning, she joined the heavenly hosts who strike the harp and swell the song before the throne of God; not to return, as here, with renewed toil and pain, for evening worship, but to be "ever with the Lord;" for there "they go no more out."

"Be with me where I am"—yes, "The Lamb which is the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Led, not now by earthly husband, however kind, but, which is "far better," by the Lamb, the heavenly Bridegroom. Fed, not with difficulty, as I have seen her husband place food upon her fork, or otherwise help her to convey it to her mouth, but by Him who fed the thousands with a few loaves and fishes, and who now gives to eat of the tree of life and of the hidden manna. Earthly affection could not dry up her tears, or remove her pain, or bribe death. But now *God* wipes away all tears from her eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away."

"That they may behold my glory which thou hast given me." O, what a rapture-bringing vision was that which burst upon those eyes so long sightless, but now healed and so suddenly opened amidst the glories which surround the Lamb, seated on his Father's throne. Our sister loved, while here, to think and speak of the glory of Christ; not only that which "is to be revealed," but that, also, which *is* revealed in the written word. The "great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh," she "earnestly desired to look into." I have heard of her asking a christian sister what she thought was meant by that saying of Paul. (Phil. 3: 10,) "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." How much more she now knows about the meaning of that passage, and everything else in the Bible, than we do, or than she did then.

May not her own beautiful and poetic description of her blindness furnish an apt and striking illustration of the contrast between her former and her present knowledge of the glory of Christ? When asked if it appeared all dark and black before her, she answered, "O no, it is just like a mist, with the sun shining on the other side." Ah! just so it is, my brethren, with our present knowledge of divine things, and especially of much that relates to the glory that Christ has with the Father. But our dear sister is now beyond the mist. She is on the side where the *sun shines*. She sees no more "through a glass darkly, but face to face." "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." Think, my friends, how transforming, as well as trans-

porting, this sight of Christ's glory must be. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Is not, then, Christ's will, about this matter, better than our wills? and do we not all, from the heart, say, "Not my will, but thine be done?"

I ought not to fail to remind you, dear friends, that Christ's will that his people should be with him, includes their bodies as well as their souls. "This is the Father's will, which hath sent me, that of all that he hath given me, I should lose *nothing*, but should raise it up again at the last day." "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words."

And now, my friends, what remains for us to do but to prepare to follow her, and to be with her where she is? Remember that in order to do so we must belong to Christ. He is the resurrection and the life, and he that believeth in him, though he were dead yet shall he live. Neither is there salvation in any to her. Believest thou this? O then, flee to Jesus. He that saved our departed friend is able and willing to save you, too. "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." O then, *come*.

And you, my dear children, whom God hath bereaved, to you especially, I commend your mother's Savior. You will need him—need him for this world, as well as the world to come. Seek him, then—seek him in this hour of sorrow, he will comfort you; seek him when pressed with the burden of sin, he will remove it; seek him in view of death, he will take away its sting; seek him with your whole hearts, and you shall one day be with him, and behold his glory.

And you, my dear brother, from whom God has taken away the trusted and loved companion of your bosom, I can only commend you, in my prayers, to the same sympathizing Friend. He has said, "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come unto you." In your hours of loneliness, he will come; in your hours of perplexity and trial and sorrow, he will come; in every time of need, he will come. O yes, and he will come *again*, for his own mouth hath said it. "I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also." "Even so come Lord Jesus."

